

INFIDELITY

1609/409
A
PROPER OBJECT

CENSURE.

Wherein is shewn;

The indispenfable Obligation that lies upon Church-rulers to exercise the Discipline instituted by CHRIST, upon such *avowed Infidels* as have been solemnly initiated Members of the Christian Church by Baptism; and, if irreclaimable, to cast them out of the Christian Society.

GLASGOW:

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M, DCC, LVI.



INFIDELITY

THE PROPER

OBJECT of CENSURE, &c.

THE publication of infidel writings in *Scotland* is but of late date, and according to the reception it meets with, will certainly have no small influence, either good or bad, upon the interest of religion. The exercise of discipline upon that occasion has been expected and wished for by many who have not hitherto been able to procure it. There is still so much of the shadow at least, or remnant of christian discipline, in this church, that the neglect of it upon this occasion is more sensible, and must therefore be attended with worse consequences, than in other churches who lament the want of it altogether.

In order to excite the rulers of this church to their duty, a small pamphlet was published last year intituled, *An Analysis of the opinions of Sopho and David Hume Esq;* wherein the irreligious tenets of these two authors were represented in several propositions, and passages quoted out of their books, wherein such propositions were plainly maintained. A reply to this very soon appeared, intituled, *Observations on the Analysis, &c.* wherein very grievous, but very groundless complaints, were made of the unfairness of some of the quotations. In the *Scots*

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Magazine for September last was inserted, a letter wherein the most bitter of all the observator's complaints is shown to be without the least foundation: This related to the charge against *Sopho*, of maintaining a necessity that is inconsistent with moral agency. The observator alledged, that he only maintained a moral, not a physical necessity. Altho' this was nothing to the purpose, the proposition being proved in the *Analysis*, from *Sopho*'s own words, without mentioning that distinction: Yet, *ex abundanti*, it was shown in that letter, that the necessity maintained by him is really a physical, not a moral necessity, in the just and proper meaning of these terms. And indeed, that the accountableness of moral agents was, by his principles, overthrown, that gentleman did not (with the modesty of his predecessors) leave it to his readers to infer, but expressly pointed out the inference himself, thereby doing what he could to destroy the whole foundation of religion and morality.

It is not worth while to take notice of the other particular complaints of the Observator. It is acknowledged, that he has shown by some of his extracts, what must be abundantly evident to any intelligent reader of these gentlemen's writings, that they often contradict themselves. His defence indeed amounts to this and no more, upon the propositions charg'd against them in the *Analysis*. But what calls for a more particular discussion is, that not satisfied, perhaps, with his own apology for his clients, he endeavours to screen them from censure, by insisting in the general, that erroneous speculations are not the proper objects of church censure. What he says upon this subject, is contained in the following paragraph.

“ The freedom of inquiry and debate, tho' it may have published some errors to the world, has undoubtedly been the source from whence many blessings have flowed upon mankind. As free inquiry alone could at first have made way for Christianity, and have borne down the opposition of synagogues, senates and schools; it is to the same noble principle we owe the reformation, and are enabled to set at defiance the tyrannical decisions of Popes and Councils. By means of free inquiry, the church of Scotland was originally established,

“ blished. In this country, therefore, all attempts to infringe
 “ so valuable a privilege in cases where the peace of society is
 “ not concerned, must ever be regarded with concern by all
 “ reasonable men. The proper objects of censure and reproof
 “ are, not freedom of thought, but licentiousness of action ;
 “ not erroneous speculations, but crimes pernicious to society.
 “ Against these ought the clergy to exert their utmost efforts ;
 “ and by such a conduct they will more advance the cause of
 “ religion, than by engaging in metaphysical disputes, which
 “ may perplex the understandings, but never can impair the
 “ morals of men.”

As it is very probable not only from the conversation one meets with every day, but from the last Assembly's taking no particular notice of these writings, that the *Observer* is not alone in his sentiments upon this subject ; and as they appear to me of the most dangerous consequence, I have been induced to offer to the public, and particularly to the consideration of the ministers of this church, the following enquiry, how far they are founded on reason or scripture. That I may do this the more distinctly, the reader may please to observe, that this author's argument, and indeed all reasoning of the same kind, is founded on the following principles, which I shall endeavour distinctly to consider.

- I. *That freedom of enquiry has led the two gentlemen, proposed to be censured, into the infidel opinions which they have published.*
- II. *That these infidel opinions of theirs never can impair the morals of men, and that the peace of society is not concerned in them.*
- III. *That erroneous speculations are not the proper objects of church censure and reproof, and that such an application of ecclesiastic discipline would infringe the valuable privilege of free thinking.*

I. The observator begins the paragraph with an encomium upon *freedom of enquiry and debate*, as the source of many blessings to mankind, to which, he tells us, we owe, not only our present establishment, but the reformation, and christianity it self; as if this was the cause in which he had drawn his pen.—I have, from my earliest years, been so profess'd and so true an admirer of liberty, that I think it little wonder if so specious a pretext is ready to impose upon many of its partisans, And instead of opposing, I should be one of the warmest advocates for his side of the question, if his application of such terms, did not appear to me, to be the grossest perversion of words, and confusion of ideas. Before I proceed to make out this, let me only put the reader in mind, that, as 'tis the ministers of this church, and not the friends of infidelity to whom I address myself, so the *Observations* are written with a professed design to reason with Christian clergymen upon their own principles: and therefore if I reason likewise from the same principles, or appeal to the bible; how little weight soever it may possibly have with the Observator; this cannot, in the present case, with any fairness, be called a begging of the question; seeing he himself, in an argument addressed to the members of our church judicatories, takes it for granted, as undoubtedly they themselves do believe, that they have a right to do something in that capacity.

Freedom of inquiry, is either *internal*, or *external*. By *external* freedom of inquiry, I mean, the absence of outward force or violence, whereby the inquirer might be limited by others, especially the governors of his country, to the embracing, or at least the professing, only of such and such tenets, and not others. By *internal* freedom of inquiry, we are to understand, (at least I understand thereby) such a love of truth in the inquirer himself, as engages him to search for, and to embrace it, for its own evidence allenarly, without being diverted therefrom by any partial consideration, any by-view, or biassed to the contrary by any wrong or criminal affection. —As the first of these, so far as the present question is concerned, will fall under consideration afterward; so I take it to

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be the second, upon which the *Observator* makes his encomium; as he will not, surely, alledge, that the establishment of Christianity, and of the reformation from Popery, and from its relicks, can be imputed so much to the moderation of their Heathen, Popish, or Prelatic adversaries, as to the honest and impartial inquiries of the Christians, Protestants, and Presbyterians of former times.

Now this impartiality, or freedom from inward prejudices against the truth, is, what I do not deny that our modern infidels very confidently boast of, and, in a supercilious contempt of Christians, most presumptuously assume the peculiar, and even exclusive honour of to themselves, whom they have, with abundance of assurance, distinguished by the name of *Free-thinkers*. And therefore I would not be surprized if, in any argument *among themselves*, this should be taken for granted. But, has the justice of this claim been, ever yet, so far yielded among *Christians*, that, in arguing with the rulers of a Christian church, the same supposition is to be admitted, and proceeded upon without any farther evidence?

The simplicity of such a procedure will appear still in a more striking light, if we reflect on the ground, upon which, in all probability, it is founded. One of the prejudices, which we frankly acknowledge, a free inquirer must overcome, is the prejudice of education. This, we allow indeed, to be *one*, but are far from admitting it to be the *only one*, that an impartial regard to truth ought to raise us above. An infidel however, having once renounced the principles in which he was educated, as if there was not another criminal affection to mislead him, very preposterously concludes, that he has conquered every prejudice, and that all who believe what they were taught, can do so upon no other evidence but the prejudice of education. And thus he immediately plumes himself, and crows over a believer; having, as he fondly imagines, given sufficient proof of an impartiality which the bulk of mankind are destitute of.

This however, is in reality, so far from being any evidence of a due regard to, or love of truth, that, in most of these cases, there

there is not a single truth that is so much as pretended to be obtained; unless it be merely negative ones. Perhaps not so much as one of that sort. *Scepticism*, is what gentlemen of this character are known chiefly to delight in. Provided they can but get some importunate and troublesome truths discarded, upon any plausible pretence, they seem to have very little concern about substituting any others in their room.—Is this love to truth?—As well may a parent boast of impartiality toward his children, when, instead of treating them, each according to his merit, he has equally driven every one of them out of his house.

It may be alledged perhaps, that the most unprejudiced conduct is, to suspend our assent, when there does not appear sufficient evidence to determine it, either on the one side or the other; and that this is really the course they take, which carries the appearance of *impartiality* on the very face of it. And I shall, by no means, refuse, that there are hundreds of cases, where this would be the part of a wise man, *i. e.* in all cases, where it is of little, or no importance, whether the thing be true or false, or whether we believe it or not, especially if, at the same time, sufficient evidence cannot be had. And that there are circumstances which would justify such a conduct in any case, must be the only thing that can give any sort of plausibility to it, tho' in very different and contrary circumstances. For surely, in a case, where evidence is to be had, and all that is dear to a man depends upon his assent to a truth of the last consequence, to argue in this manner, would, indeed, carry, on the face of it, the very highest aggravation of folly. If any man thinks, he has reason to doubt, whether the city of *Canton* was on fire, when lord *Anson* was in *Ghina*, about a dozen years ago; why not? Let him suspend his assent to this fact, till he can be better satisfied about the evidence of it. There is nothing of moment, that will be affected by his belief, or disbelief of it. But if he should be awakened at midnight, with the news that *his own house* was on fire, and should, upon that occasion, judge, that he had reason, from some circumstances wherewith the message was accompanied, (not to believe

lieve the relation false, but only) to suspend his assent for the present, and so should lay him down to sleep again; would not every body conclude, that he deserved to be burnt in his bed, for an egregious trifler?

But let us suppose, what I am very far from yielding, that their departure from the principles in which they were educated is an evidence, not of their enmity to truth (which, it is, however, at least, as likely to proceed from) but of their love to it. Does their overcoming *one* prejudice, and that one of the least and most harmless, necessarily imply a conquest of *every* prejudice? The prejudice of education, I say, is one of the most innocent of all those that truth has to struggle against. Far be it from me to say any thing in *vindication* of it. I know that every free and honest enquirer must endeavour to get rid of this, as well as the rest: because it implies, tho' perhaps no direct enmity, yet want of due love to truth. It is a criminal indolence, which is apt to produce a small degree of the same effect, that more powerful prejudices have upon others. While active enemies oppose the truth with animosity, the slothful believer is not sufficiently penetrated with it, even when it happens to be truth to which he gives his cold and accidental assent. His belief of it is not so solid, and so well founded as to influence his practice. But after all, are there not prejudices which mislead the proud, the voluptuous, the profane sinner, that are ten times more criminal than this? more directly opposite to the sincere love of truth, and more inconsistent with an unbiassed regard for it? What shall we say of downright *hatred of the light, because our deeds are evil**? Of *not liking to retain God in our knowledge*†, *saying to the Almighty, depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways*‡? Of *enmity against God, because the carnal mind is not subject to the law of God*§? Of *hating knowledge*¶? Of *loving the praise of men more than the praise of God***? These are prejudices, with which an indolent credulity is not to be compared. Nor will a departure from the received doctrine concerning the evil of sin, the wrath of God against it, &c. be allowed

* John iii. 19, 20. † Rom. i. 28. ‡ Job xxi. 14. § Rom. viii. 7. ¶ Prov. i. 22, 29.

** John xii. 43.

as sufficient evidence of an inquirer's freedom from them. And yet the ministers of this church, to whom the Observer makes his appeal, are obliged to believe that there are *such* prejudices against the truth, because the Bible tells them so, and that, till once *they* be overcome, there can be no *free inquiry*.

Nay more, *they* are, for the same reason, obliged to believe likewise, that the very rejecting of truths that are of the highest importance, and proposed with sufficient evidence, is, of itself a proof to them, (whatever light it may appear in to others) that the person who rejects them is *not* a free inquirer, but must be supposed to indulge himself in the most criminal prejudices. 'Tis certain, that, whatever more may be included in that faith which, by the gospel, is made the condition of salvation, an assent to the *essential* doctrines of religion that are thus proposed, must be allowed to be, not only necessarily implied, but the foundation of all the rest. And 'tis as certain that, if these truths could be *innocently* rejected by a fair, honest, and impartial inquirer, the hearty embracing of them would never have been made, by our Saviour, the point upon which the eternal happiness or misery of men was to turn. The immediate object of the divine approbation or disapprobation, must certainly be the temper of mind, the honesty and impartiality, or the prejudice, with which one applies to an inquiry. How then can a Christian clergyman receive it as a certain truth, (which undoubtedly he must) that *he who believeth not shall be damned*, and yet be persuaded, at the same time, that *he who believeth not*, may, for all that, be an honest, unprejudiced, or *free inquirer*?

Very different is the character of an unbeliever, which is given by him, who, among Christians, is acknowledged to be *the searcher of hearts*, and who *knows what is in man*. The Bible assures us, that *he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.* And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men *LOVED* darkness rather than light, *BECAUSE* their deeds were evil. For every one that *doth evil, HATETH* the light, neither cometh to the light, *LEST* his deeds should be reprov'd. But *he that doth truth*

cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God *. There we are told : He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son †. That, if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost ; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God should shine unto them ‡. Infidelity is represented in the scripture, not only as a sin (which it could not be, if it was consistent with freedom of inquiry) but as the chief sin, being indeed the source of all the rest. And therefore our Saviour told his disciples, that when the Comforter is come, he will reprove the world of sin, because, says he, they believe not on me §. And as it is the great sin, so it will be the chief cause of future punishment. For, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, it will be to take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ ¶. And says the same apostle again, That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had PLEASURE in unrighteousness ††. And therefore we find another inspired apostle establishing the visible faith or infidelity of men, as a test of their respective characters, even in the judgment of their fellow creatures. Hereby, says he, know ye the Spirit of God. Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God. And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.—They are of the world : THEREFORE speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God : he that knoweth God heareth us ; he that is not of God, heareth not us. HEREBY know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error ‡*. The apostle Paul acquaints us that the effect of heresies is to distinguish characters, and point out such as are to be approved or disapproved. There must be also heresies among you, that they who are approved may be made manifest among you §†. And he assures us, that If any man consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godli-

* John iii. 18.--21. † 1 John v. 10. ‡ 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4. § John xvi. 9.

†† 2 Thess. i. 8. ‡ Ch. ii. 12. ‡* 1 John iv. 2, 3, 5, 6. §† 1 Cor. xi. 19.

godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men OF CORRUPT MINDS; and destitute of the truth *. On the other hand, our Saviour lays it down as a certain maxim: *Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice* ||.

I have appealed to the Scripture, because the Observator has condescended to submit the point to the judgment of professed Christians. But after all, what is there, in the whole of what the Scripture says upon this subject, but the downright common sense of a very plain thing? The very same rule of judging pointed out in this matter, that we are apt to observe on every other occasion? Were we to pass by a farm, which, instead of corn and grass, was covered all over with nothing but briars and thorns, thistles and useless weeds; would we not be ready to impute to the owner, either egregious slothfulness, or something worse? to infer, that he either indulged himself in scandalous idleness, or was engaged in some more criminal pursuit? If we saw a Pilot steering a ship, not into an harbour, which opened its hospitable arms to his view, but in a direct course upon the most dangerous rocks, or devouring quicksands; would we not certainly conclude, that he was acted by some unworthy motive? Would any man, in the first case, cast the blame on the soil or the climate, when he saw the neighbouring grounds smiling with plenty? Or, in the second, on the winds and tide while other ships were sailing into the harbour with a prosperous gale? In like manner; if there be, with relation to our most important concerns, any such thing as truth; and if it be distinguished from error by sufficient evidence; what else can hinder a diligent inquirer from obtaining the possession of it, but some criminal bias that turns him out of his road? the indulgence of some prejudice, which is inconsistent with *the freedom of his inquiry*? Is truth so ungrateful a soil, as to disappoint the labours of the most industrious, honest, and careful cultivator thereof? more treacherous than the winds and waves are, to such as expose themselves to their mercy? On the contrary,

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* 1 Tim. vi. 3, 4, 5.

|| John xviii. 37.

trary; does not the common sense of mankind readily assent to what is expressly asserted by the wise man? *If thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding: Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding: If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord; and find the knowledge of God**. Even tho' we should not have recourse to the goodness of God, and the express promise of Jesus Christ, who has declared, that, *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself†*. Yet is it not likely that what is true, must have have a more probable appearance at least to an unbiassed understanding, than that which is not true? That as truth must needs have a real foundation in the nature of things, which error cannot have, the first must be most obvious to an attentive mind, that was not prepossessed with some prejudice against it, a case which is too common in the present state of mankind.

Indeed, if there was no criterion, whereby the most important truth concerning our everlasting interests could be distinguished from the opposite error; or, if it was accompanied with no evidence; then, I confess, the blame of men's missing it in their searches, must be laid, not upon themselves, but where wicked men, I believe, would gladly lodge it, upon the Author of their beings. But, if this were the case; to what purpose did the gentlemen, whose vindication the Observer has undertaken, engage in the pursuit of so mere a chimaera? Why does any man write, who is sensible that there is no sufficient evidence to be produced for what he advances? And whatever any of the Observer's friends may imagine, can he think, that the general assembly of the church of *Scotland* is disposed to admit such a reflection upon that God, whose ministers they have the honour to bear the character of, and that in the very business of religious truth? Nay, if this were the case, what would become of his own pompous encomium upon *freedom of enquiry*? Where would be the advantage of a searcher's being ever so well qualified to hunt after a thing that

* Prov. ii. 2.

† John vii. 17.

that is not to be found? Or that, if he should happen to light upon it, could not be distinguished from things of the most opposite qualities? How can it possibly be known, whether *Christianity, and the Reformation* are blessings to mankind? By what means, on such a supposition can he be satisfied that they are right things, or indeed that they are wrong either?

Error, in all things unlike to truth, is extremely inconsistent with itself. Unbelievers are apt to complain for want of evidence, when they are reproached with their unbelief. And yet the only ground they have for this complaint, is, that God, in great wisdom, has seen fit to furnish the fundamental truths of religion, just with that precise degree of evidence which is most highly proper; the very degree of it, which alone could make their unbelief criminal, and which occasions the blame of it to lie at their door. They insist for demonstration, or such overpowering evidence, as would cut off all occasion of cavil, and obviate every objection. But God, who is infinitely wiser, sees that this would be a very improper degree of evidence for a state of trial and probation, as well as unsuitable to his design, of suffering some notorious offenders to perish in their own folly and wickedness, and to be made standing monuments of his justice and displeasure.

The essential and most important truths both of natural and revealed religion, have just such a degree of evidence, as serves to distinguish different characters, and try the good or bad dispositions of men, by the reception they meet with; such a degree of it, as is abundantly sufficient for the sincere, honest, unprejudiced inquirer; and, at the same time, short of what is necessary to force conviction upon those who are not disposed to receive it, or biassed with inveterate prejudice against it. It has always given entire satisfaction, not only to the good, well-disposed soul, but to the wisest and sagacious, in all ages, yea to the first-rate genius's, that have appeared but rarely, as a sort of prodigies, at times when knowledge and learning, when arts and sciences were cultivated to the utmost, such as *Socrates, Plato, Cicero, &c.* as to natural religion; *Grotius, Locke, Newton, Milton, Addison, &c.* as to revealed religion; While the *minuti philosophi*, the conceited

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little Sceptics with as much learning, as to get acquaintance with objections, and without penetration or inclination enough, to get over them, are never left altogether destitute of difficulties to exercise their inferior talents upon. And tho', in their own views of things, 'tis impossible to assign a single reason that will bear telling, for their troubling the rest of the world with their objections; yet there are few of them able to stand the temptation which this affords of displaying their own depth and acuteness in detecting the mistakes which so many great men have had the simplicity to labour under. While the one opens a well-disposed mind, to embrace with pleasure, the grand, the sublime, and interesting truths, and suffers the evidence thereof to come home, with its full force and energy, upon a kindred soul, delighted and ravished with the noble and generous prospect: The narrow views of the other are fixed upon, and, as 'tis fit, are detained with the difficulties that occur. While the bright evidence of truth shines with lustre into the bottom of a mind, cleared of that dust which is apt to be raised by unsubdued passions, and irrational appetites or affections; the attention of a Sceptic is diverted from this agreeable view, by the deceitful glare of objections, which are permitted, for a just punishment of their enmity to truth and goodness, to perplex and bewilder them, like the devils in *Milton*,

Who find no end in wandring mazes lost.

For, if we may allude to the words of another Poet,

Errors, like straws, upon the surface flow,

He who would search for pearl, must dive below.

And, how could the matter have been more wisely contrived? That there should be evidence sufficient to satisfy any reasonable man, any fair and serious inquirer; and yet not enough to spoil the virtue of our assent, and to confound the characters of men. It is highly fit and proper, that the truths, even of natural religion itself, like those of the gospel, should be, as an inspired Apostle expresses it, *to the one, the savour of death unto death; and to the other, the savour of life unto life**. That the objections which are raised against the truths of religion, while they are not able, in a comparison

* 2 Cor. ii. 16.

son with the evidence that accompanies them, to retard the motion of an honest mind toward an union with its congenial truth, should, however, prove a stumbling block, over which an enemy might fall and perish.

Truth is one of the most valuable possessions, tending greatly to promote the advantage and felicity of him who *buys and sells it not*. And therefore God has not thought it meet, that access to it should lie open to every one that has rendered himself unworthy of so noble an acquisition; particularly by an inexcusable disaffection to it. What more reasonable constitution, then, could there have been, than its tendency to meet him who loves it, and to fly from him who hates it? For which reason, we frequently find, in that standard of truth to a Christian, I mean the *Bible*, a *spirit of error and delusion* mentioned, as a just punishment inflicted, upon those who are not disposed to embrace the truth. This was the cause of that darkness that overspread the Pagan world. *And even as they did not like*, says the Apostle, *to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind**. This was likewise the reason of that thick and surprizing mist of ignorance and error, which so long covered the face of the *Antichristian* church. *Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceiveableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; BECAUSE they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved: And FORTHIS CAUSE God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie†*. And for the same reason it is, that *in the last days, perilous times shall come, when men of corrupt minds shall be reprobate concerning the faith, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth, because as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also RESIST the truth. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables§*.

But, of all the instances upon record, of error being the *penal* effect of prejudices against the truth, that of the *Jewish* nation

* Rom. i. 28.

† 2 Th. ii. 9, 10, 11.

§ 2 Tim. iii. 7, 8. and iv. 3, 4.

nation is the most remarkable, and the most striking. Their prejudices against the truths of the gospel, and the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom, were so violent, and so obstinately indulged, that even he, who was the light of the world, was thereby provoked to cover the precious truths which he clearly revealed to the more impartial and unprejudiced, with such a vail as, he knew, they would not be able to penetrate thro'. *And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God; but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand* †. "He who will insist, (as a late writer comments on "this text) that the words do necessarily imply a punishment "in judgment, rather than in mercy, shall not be contended "with by me; so little reason do I think we have to stand out, "from the apprehension of its impinging on the moral attributes of God. Be it then a punishment in judgment. To "suppose no such for long slighted grace, is making the highest benefit the cheapest and the vilest: and if we suppose "any, the most adequate seems to be the loss of that which "had been long and impiously abused †." And this is what ought the rather to be attended to by us, seeing that devoted people seem to be set up, in the just and righteous judgment of God, for a standing example, and lasting monument, by way of warning to the rest of the world, in this particular respect. "This dreadful judgment of God, to use the "words of the same writer, still continues to operate with "unremitted vigour. For, as in civil tribunals, which are "wont, in the case of more atrocious criminals, whose death "but half satisfies the demands of justice, to doom the lifeless "carcass to be gibetted up in terror, and exposed to the sight "of the survivors, so it hath pleased eternal justice to act, in "its disposition of the remains of this unhappy nation, &c. ¶" And is it to be supposed, that so good a being as God, will be more just in punishing hatred of truth, than gracious in rewarding the love of it, with the gratification of so rational an appetite, and so acceptable to himself? On the contrary, we are assured by Solomon, that knowledge is easy to him that

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† Luke viii. 10. ‡ Warburton's Sermons, Vol. I. p. 325. || Ib. p. 329.

hath understanding *. i. e. as I apprehend it, to him that can truly think with freedom, freedom from the worst of tyrants, a man's own corrupt lusts, and sinful affections; whose inferior appetites, and lower passions are not so far triumphant in their rebellion, as to usurp the place of the understanding, and turn it down from that high rank of supreme government in the soul, that is its right, and that it had in the original constitution of man. But if this be a true state of the matter, is it not obvious, to every Christian at least, how little reason unbelievers have to boast of the *freedom of their inquiry*?

Freedom of thought, however, and *erroneous speculations* are, it seems, in the Observer's opinion, somewhat a-kin, if not synonymous terms. "The proper objects, says he, of censure and reproof, are not *freedom of thought*, but licentiousness of action, not *erroneous speculations*, but crimes pernicious to society." And in the same paragraph, he grants, that "it may have published some errors to the world."—I could venture to lay any wager, if the gentleman would condescend to define his terms, that he, and I, have not the same ideas to this expression, *freedom of thought*. For, that an honest, diligent, and impartial inquiry, unbiassed by any wrong affection (which is my notion of it) would lead a man into errors of infinite importance in the eternal concerns of his soul, I'm confident, he will not pretend to say. If it were so, *freedom of thought* would have no advantage over prejudice. On the contrary, it would be better, in some cases, to be without it. Whatever it be that he understands by it, he thinks "it has undoubtedly been the source from whence many blessings have flowed upon mankind." In a word, it is free inquiry alone, he tells us, to which we owe *Christianity, the reformation, and the present establishment of the church of Scotland*.—If it were not for the conclusion which the gentleman had in his view, and for the sake of which he ascribes these blessings to *freedom of thought*, one would be tempted to think that, in his premises at least, he uses the terms in the same sense that I do, and that he was of my opinion, that the dis-

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covery of *truth* is the true effect of a fair, unprejudiced inquiry. But if he be strictly kept to this sense, and obliged (by what he may, possibly, take for an ungentlemanly rigour) to use the terms in the same sense, when he comes to the conclusion; how will he get them to serve the cause of his friends *erroneous speculations*? The point which he has in view all the while. For, it seems, the same noble principle (we must take words without ideas, till gentlemen submit to the drudgery of defining them) has, in the Observator's opinion, entered into *David Hume Esq*; and having, perhaps, already exhausted all its blessings, or, like the sea, when it has flowed to its height, ebbing as fast back again, by him presents the world with the *direct reverse* of all these blessings, and teaches us, that the former establishment was preferable to the present, Popery to the Reformation, and Heathenism to Christianity. Yet, because of the blessings it has formerly produced, we must take it, it seems, for better for worse, and let the good effects of it atone for the bad ones.

It has been a common opinion, among the necessity gentlemen, as well as others, that the same precise causes will always produce the same precise effects. But how the same cause that *once* produces Christianity and the Reformation, comes now to have the very contrary effects; this is the mystery. However, as the Observator, tho' above any logical precision, must certainly have perceived some connexion or other between his ideas, tho' perhaps too subtile for a plain Christian at first view, I have been casting about, to try if I could light upon it. And, after all, 'tis impossible for me to make any thing of it, upon supposition that he, and I, all along, annex the same ideas to the same terms. But if, by *free-thinking*, he means, *an itch of novelty*, (as, I shrewdly suspect, he does) I verily believe, it will unravel the whole mystery. For my part, I cannot think of any other way that his argument could have proceeded in his own mind, but this.—“Free-thinking [*i. e.* an itch of novelty] loves revolutions. *Christianity, the reformation, &c.* were, at the time they were brought about, considerable revolutions. They must, therefore, have been, *then*, great blessings, as they could not but gratifie this noble itch.

itch. But now, *Popery, Heathenism, &c.* would be as great revolutions. And therefore they must, *now*, be equally great blessings to the world. And so our friend squire *Hume*, that elegant writer, must needs, in tracing all these steps directly backward, have been acted by the same noble principle, and deserves the same encouragement with the former instruments of the same sort of blessings."—If we should try to affix any other idea to the term *free-thinking*, I cannot see what use could be made of it in the present argument. For, if it was a freedom from criminal prejudices, an honest, and sincere love of, and diligent inquiry after *truth*, that opened the way for *Christianity and the Reformation*; how could the same dispositions lead back again to *Popery and Heathenism*? Or, if *Christianity and the Reformation* were *blessings*, because of their conformity to *truth*; is it possible that *Popery and Heathenism* can be blessings too, upon the same account?

To illustrate the force and justness of this sort of reasoning with Christian clergymen, and to show what advantage may be made of general, indefinite terms, by a little sleight of hand in shuffling ideas; let us suppose an unconscionable quack spreading doses of poison over a country, and murdering as many people as have the simplicity to take his drugs. And when the public indignation is risen against him; suppose a sagacious Observer endeavours to quell their resentment by some such harangue as the following. "Good people, you are in a gross mistake to decry the *gentlemen of the faculty*. *Physicians* are the sources from whence many blessings have flowed upon mankind. I could give you many an instance where the taking of *drugs* have saved mens lives. And therefore the *distributors of them* deserve, I assure you the publick encouragement; and all attempts to infringe so valuable a privilege, must ever be regarded with concern by all reasonable men." Or suppose a gentleman had got a tutor to his son, who instead of teaching him the principles of religion, virtue, and learning, made it his business to debauch the boy in his morals and principles, to lead him into idleness and gaming, and to persuade him of the innocence of profanity, whoredom, drunkenness, &c. Would it hinder a good man to rid his family of such a nuisance, should

he be told, with ever so much grimace, "That he is greatly deceived, if he is not sensible of the advantage of *education*, and that *Tutors* have often done great service to their pupils?" — Thus, however, the argument stands in the *Observations*. — Christianity, the Reformation, and our present establishment in the church of *Scotland*, are great blessings, and it was a noble principle from whence they flowed, THEREFORE they who endeavour to rob us of these blessings, and counteract the laudable instruments of them, must certainly deserve all manner of encouragement, and all attempts to infringe so valuable a privilege must ever be regarded with concern by all reasonable men.

Before I have done with "that master prejudice, the INNOCENCE OF ERROR," as Mr. *Warburton* speaks in the above cited sermon, let me observe with him, that the Christian religion is distinguished from false religions, as well as from corruptions of the true, particularly in respect of the stress that is therein laid upon the knowledge and belief of the truth, and the necessity thereof in order to the holiness and happiness of mankind. The publick teachers among the ancient Heathens, viz. the priests, and philosophers, had imbibed from one another very inveterate prejudices concerning the communication of truth to the people. The priests wrapt every thing about with mystery, and carefully sequestered the doctrine of religion from common eyes. The same incommunicable spirit prevailed in the schools of the *philosophers*, who even entered into solemn engagements of secrecy, and kept their knowledge confined within the limits of their own sect or profession. In like manner the *Pharisees* in our Saviour's time, had taken away the key of knowledge* from the people, whereby, he tells them, they shut up the kingdom of heaven against men†. And we know who have done the same thing among Christians, maintaining, that ignorance is the mother of devotion. With all these, our present infidels do greatly symbolise, who think it a matter of very great indifference, what opinions people have, about the most important and most essential articles of religion, and that error is as friendly to the eternal happiness of men, as truth.

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* Luke ii. 35.

† Mat. xxiii. 13.

Whereas the author of Christianity has set the matter upon a footing that must evidently appear, at the very first view, infinitely more rational, and more conformable to the original constitution of human nature, in which the understanding has the rank of the leading faculty. He who *is the truth* * promises to his disciples, that *they shall know the truth, and the TRUTH shall make them free* †, to bring them to *salvation thro' the belief of the truth* ‡. And therefore he expressly enjoined his Apostles, to *teach all nations* §, and enumerates it among the proofs of his being the true *Messiah*, the light of the world, that even *the poor had the gospel preached to them* ¶. And, as the obligation upon every private Christian to *search the Scriptures* **, and to *grow in knowledge* *§, is unquestionable; so it has always been an essential part of the Christian discipline, to instruct every individual in the doctrines of religion, and even to require some account of their knowledge thereof, before they be admitted to the participation of the sacraments, which may serve to account for the stress that is, by Christians, laid upon soundness of belief.

As I have, all along however, spoken only of the most *important and essential* doctrines of Christianity, I hope no body will be led, by what has been said, to apply the above *Scripture doctrine* concerning truth and error, to *every truth, and every error* that has a relation to religion. The *essential* doctrines of it, as they must be supposed to be cloathed with sufficient evidence; (otherwise the reflection would land upon God himself) so they are intimately connected with the practice of religion; and therefore the belief of them may well be made the test of an honest, well-disposed mind, and the disbelief of them, a certain indication of prejudice, partiality, or slothfulness. At the same time, even upon the subject of religion, many a truth, doubtless, there may be, either concerning the *manner* of things, which it is not necessary for us to know, or concerning *circumstantials*, that do not directly affect the condition of salvation; which as God has not given us the same light about, and as mistakes about them do not so necessarily infer a wicked disposition, or lead to the trans-

* John xiv. 6. § John viii. 32. † 1 Theff. ii. 13. || Matt. xxviii. 19.
 ‡ Matt. ii. 5. ** John v. 39. *§ 2 Pet. iii. 18.

transgression of the commands of God; so we may be more innocently ignorant of, or mistaken about them. With respect to these, the rule of Christianity, and indeed of common sense, is: *Him that is weak in the faith, receive you, but not to doubtful disputations. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not, and let not him that eateth not, judge him that eateth* *.

No man can be more disposed than I am; if I do not very far mistake myself, to extend the exercise of forbearance, and charity, to whatever does not directly affect the very vitals and substance of religion. But I wish, some, even in the character of Christian clergymen, had not suffered themselves to be imposed upon by the writings of unbelievers, and thereby led to misplace, and apply to *the most fundamental* articles of religion, that just moderation, which the Scripture enjoins, and which is allowed by good men to be due, in the case of smaller differences among Christians, about the less necessary, and less plain speculations and circumstantialia of it. I own, it is a suspicion of this, that infidelity is regarded with so favourable an eye, even among professed Christians, and that so little stress is, by many, even of this character, laid upon *faith*, where the Scripture evidently lays so much, that has drawn from me so full a discussion of this matter. And tho' it may be very difficult to draw the line precisely between essentials, and non-essentials, there are, doubtless, for all that, some things that may, obviously, and indisputably, be ranked in the first class. Tho' it may be impossible to perceive the precise moment when day-light begins to dawn; no body can be at a loss to pronounce it day when the sun is shining in his eyes. In like manner, how uncertain soever we may be, about the necessity and importance of some truths in religion, it is, nevertheless, obvious at first view, that the doctrines represented in the *Analysis*, are inconsistent with the very essentials of all religion.

II. This leads me to the second branch of the argument. For, the Observator, in the paragraph referred to, pretty plainly insinuates as if he took the opinions in question to be of the most

* Rom. xiv. 1, 3.

most harmless sort; calling them "metaphysical disputes which may perplex the understandings, but never can impair the morals of men." I have already prevented myself upon this part of the subject. It was the business of my first letter to point out the immoral tendency of that doctrine of *Sopho's*, which the *Observer* has both denied, and defended. And till once some reply be made to what has been already said, it would be superfluous to enter much farther into this argument. But in good earnest, what can the gentleman really mean by such an assertion? I would fain know how it is possible to make a *more direct* attack upon morals? *Can it never impair the morals of men*, to persuade them, that, when they have committed fifty murders, robberies, adulteries, perjuries, &c. the supreme Being is not, in the least, offended therewith: that, as he knows better, than to blame them for it; so it would be a piece of arrant folly, for them to be displeased with themselves upon that account? For my own part, I am half ashamed to be caught saying even a sentence or two, upon a thing the evidence of which is intuitive. I know not but our infidels will put us next upon *proving*, that a part is less than the whole. Sure I am, if a thief was lurking about my house, who of himself had a violent inclination to do mischief, but was somewhat apprehensive of the consequence; it would be no very kind office in any neighbour, to exhaust all his rhetoric in endeavouring to persuade the fellow, that he had no reason at all to be afraid, that the judges now had a quite different view of such things from what they were wont to have, that he could assure him, not one of them would be, in the least, displeased; nay, that no wise man would ever think a bit the worse of him, tho' he should plunder all that I had, and murder me and my whole family to boot.—If I should catch a neighbour at this kind office; suppose he had the assurance to tell me, that such "metaphysical disputes may perplex the understandings, but never can impair the morals of men:" would this be any thing better, than adding insult and mockery to mischief and injury?

Indeed, as nothing can well be conceived to be more directly levelled against the morals of men, than the doctrine of necessity,

cessity, as maintained by *Sopho*; I cannot think the Observer, in this assertion, means any thing that has a peculiar respect to this particular doctrine, but is only insisting on what his friend has inculcated in several passages of his *Essays*, namely, that the morals or actions of men are not at all affected by their principles, or opinions, in general, be what they will. — By the by, may not an estimate be formed, of our pretended free-thinkers love to truth, from the degree of their esteem for it, that is every where apparent in their writings? They seem to think it has no prerogative above error, no criterion to distinguish it, or to enable us to obtain the possession of it, and when we are in possession of it, that we have no advantage thereby, either in respect of holiness or happiness, and that a man has as good a chance to behave well under the most fundamental error, as under the clearest views of important truths, there being no danger of being misled by error, in any of our actions. Hence the sympathetic concern, they are so frequently discovering for *erroneous speculations*; and that, instead of endeavouring to increase the number of truths enjoyed by themselves or others, their principal aim is only to dispossess us of what has been regarded in that light. Upon this account, they have been, usually and justly, denominated, not *believers* of any thing, but *infidels*, or *unbelievers*. Accordingly, the value they would be thought to have for *freedom of inquiry*, without any reason that can easily be assigned, is not upon account of the connexion it has with truth, or because it is a sure guide to that noble acquisition, but absolutely independent of any such relation, or whether it lead us to *truth*, or to *erroneous speculations*. So that 'tis more than probable, if ever their unwearied labours shall be crowned with so much success, as to drive Christianity out of this island, that the knowledge and learning, which evidently distinguishes Christendom from every other part of the globe, tho' they, in the mean time, avail themselves thereof, in their ungrateful opposition of that religion, would share the same fate, and be banished along with its parent; and that for a very plain and obvious reason, *viz.* that no other institution lays such a stress upon the knowledge and belief of the truth. But if *true free-thinking* is really nothing else,

life, but an *impartial love of truth*; and if nothing can be truly loved, that is not *esteemed*, it is easy to infer, how groundless their pretensions are to *freedom of thought*.

As to the influence of a man's opinions upon his practice, it was so clearly demonstrated in a letter, published in the magazine for April 1753, that I shall only refer the reader to it, till some reply is made to what was there advanced. But as the appeal is, by the Observer, made to Christians, let us again consult the *Bible*, and there we will find, instead of that independency, which the gentleman asserts, (for he proves nothing, nor attempts to do it) that, on the contrary, the strictest and most indissoluble connection is always maintained between the persuasions of the understanding, and the morals of the heart and life. Faith is constantly declared, in the word of God, to be the true and the only principle of good works, or of right morals. *Without faith*, the scripture assures us, *it is impossible to please God* *. It is *faith* that is said to *purifie our hearts* †. We are said to be *sanctified by faith* ‡, to be *sanctified through the truth* §. It is *knowing the truth that makes us free indeed* ¶. This, says the Apostle John, *is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith* **. For this reason, good morals are called the *obedience of faith* *†, and the *work of faith* *‡. Upon this account, faith is represented as the best defence against temptations to wickedness, as *the shield of faith* *§, and *the breastplate of faith* *¶. And, not to multiply quotations that might be added to the same purpose, the holy actions of good men are all ascribed by the Apostle in the 11th chap. of the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, to the influence of their faith, their faith, particularly, of a future retribution.

And indeed it must be extremely obvious to the reason of mankind, that, upon the removal of this grand principle, we would be deprived of the chief motive to a good and holy life. *For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him* ††. And

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†† Heb. xi. 6. † Acts xv. 9. ‡ Chap. xxvi. 18. § John xvii. 17. ¶ John viii. 32.

** 1 John v. 4. *† Rom. xvi. 26. *‡ 1 Thess. i. 3. *§ Eph. vi. 16.

*§ 1 Thess. v. 8. †† Heb. xi. 6.

is as certain, that a *physical necessity*, (which has been shown to be the necessity maintained) leaves no room for either rewards or punishments. So that if ever the very substance, and essentials of all religion have been, or can be directly attacked; they surely have been by *Sopho*. For all religion is, and must be founded upon man's being an accountable creature. A stone, or a stick is, evidently, as capable of religion as he, if he be acted upon by the same sort of necessity as they are. It would be equally absurd to talk of a *future judgment* to the hills and mountains, and to their inhabitants, if the one were as irresistibly determined in all their actions, as the other; if the last could no more help their barrenness in good works, than the first, when parched by a drought, their barrenness in grass, or corn. Repentance, which is the very beginning of good morals, would evidently, upon such a supposition, be a gross absurdity. Indeed the whole of *revealed* as well as of natural religion, particularly the satisfaction made to divine justice for the sins of men, by the sacrifice of the Son of God, does so plainly suppose the *dreadful*, the *unconceivable* evil of sin, and the high displeasure of God against it, that it is not easy, upon this occasion, to avoid noticing the singular effrontery that is necessary in order to make it a question, whether the maintaining the innocence of sin, and its inoffensiveness to the supreme Being, does not overturn the whole, of whatever has been called religion, to the very foundations?

III. Let us next proceed to consider the other pretence, upon which he would persuade the church of *Scotland* to wink at so direct an attack upon the very foundations, not only of Christianity, but of all religion, namely, that their censuring of such doctrines, would be an *infringement of the privilege of free-thinking*; and that *erroneous speculations are not the proper object of their censure*.

If censuring the teachers of such doctrine, was an infringement of so valuable a privilege, I should be the last man to plead for it. But what will become of this argument, if infidelity, instead of being free-thinking, is a formal and certain indication of the contrary, and if church censure is no infringement of that privilege?

As to the first, enough has been already said, to satisfy all those, at least, who have not renounced their faith in the scripture, that whatever would be infringed by censuring unbelievers, it is, by no means, *the privilege of free-thinking*. But after all, suppose our infidels were really *freer-thinkers* than, 'tis certain, they are; what infringement can any church censure be of this valuable privilege, when it is dispensed according to the rules of the gospel?

It is well known that, in *Scotland*, excommunication, which is the highest church censure, does not, in the least degree, affect a man either in his estate, or in the liberty, or safety of his person, or in any temporal privilege, which he enjoys in common with other subjects, as a member of the civil community. And, for my part, I take this opportunity to profess my joy that it is so. *As the kingdom of Christ is not of this world*; so the government of it ought to be entirely of a *spiritual* nature. And every mixture of temporal dominion, or of outward force and violence, as it cannot, possibly, have any good effect, and must, if it does any thing, make men hypocrites, I take to be a relick of *Antichrist's* kingdom. But while this is the case, the utmost that an infidel can suffer, by the highest censure of this church, is only, to be as formally separated from the Christian society, as he was once incorporated therein, and excluded from the spiritual privileges, that are peculiar to, and can only be truly and sincerely valued by those that are of our religion. In a word, it is nothing else, but a deed of the society, excluding them from communion with them *as Christians*, in such things only as an honest man would exclude himself from.

Is this an infringement of the privilege of free-thinking? How happy would the primitive Christians have been; how highly would they have esteemed such freedom in the choice of their religion, had they suffered no other sort of persecution? Had the *Jews* and *Heathens* allowed them not only the exercise of their own religion, but liberty likewise to impugn the established belief, without the least danger to their persons,

or estates, without excluding them, even from the highest offices of civil magistracy, and only insisted for a liberty to themselves, of observing the rules of their own religion, without being obliged to admit impertinent, officious, and inconsistent Christians, to eat of their sacrifices, and partake of their most sacred mysteries, whenever they had a mind; nay, to hold priestly offices among them, and give their vote in the management of their religious concerns, as *Jews* or *Heathens*? How happy had our reformers been, how highly had they prized such liberty, had the church of *Rome* made no other encroachment on it, but by excluding them from their mass, their adoration of the host, and of saints, images, &c. and from sitting in their councils? In a word, from nothing, but what every Protestant, who was sincere in his profession, and had, in reality, any religion at all of his own, was thereby led to renounce, and separate from. Had this been the case, our *pretended* free-thinkers, in all probability, would not have been so well furnished with those nervous and beautiful reasonings in behalf of liberty, which they so grossly mistake, and abuse by their wild and unjust application of them.

And here, I cannot help stopping a little, to observe the conduct of our infidels, with respect to this topic of *persecution*, which they usually affect to make a handle of, to the prejudice of religion; as if it was a fruit that could only grow upon that tree. It is well known, how far *M. Bayle* has carried the matter, who seemed to think that, if the civil government of a country was in the hands of *Atheists*, it would be attended with this advantage, that no man would be persecuted for religion. And, in imitation of him, every infidel seems to think, he has Christianity at a visible disadvantage, when he touches this sore place.

'Tis very true, that Christianity lays a peculiar stress upon the belief of the truth. This, we are very far from being ashamed to own. Nay, if the fall of man had not raised the *brutal* to the prejudice of the *human* faculties, it must have been a recommendation of it, to every *rational* creature. But 'tis as true, that it lays no stress at all upon such a *pretended* faith, as carnal weapons are capable of producing. And, however some

religious men may have overdone, in an excess of zeal, and irreligious men, assuming the character of Christians, have much oftner brought that character under reproach, by a conduct inconsistent with it; I will yet venture to affirm, and undertake to maintain that, as true religion is absolutely incapable, and utterly abhorrent of the cruelties that have been perpetrated upon that pretext, so 'tis certain in fact, that the highest rigours, and most inhuman barbarities, which are to be met with, in the odious history of Persecution, have really flowed from men that had no religion at all, but were almost avowed Atheists and infidels. A cursory glance over some of the most famous Persecutions, will perhaps set this matter in a light, that may happen not to be very familiar to some free-thinkers, who take things upon trust from *M. Bayle*.

Not to mention *Cain*, the very first persecutor for religion; was it religion, or pride, that moved *Haman* to contrive that extensive scheme of cruelty, whereby the whole church of God was to have been cut off at one stroke? Was *Antiochus Epiphanes* a religionist, who would have done the same thing to the temple of *Elymais*, that he did to that of *Jerusalem*? Were the *Sadducees*, who first raised a persecution against Christianity, the greatest believers, or rather were they not the pretended free-thinkers of that time? Was *Nero*, and the other Roman emperors, who persecuted the primitive Christians with such barbarous cruelty, noted for religion? Were not many of the Popes, and of the court of *Rome* who were the most barbarous persecuters, likewise infamous for their infidelity? So as even to trample the cross sometimes under their feet, in contempt of that fable, as they called it, to which they owed their grandeur? Was not *Leo X.* a noted infidel? Did not the emperor *Charles V.* keep the Pope a prisoner, while he caused prayers to be put up thro' all his dominions for his liberty? And could it be religion, or ambition, that prompted him to crush the Protestants of Germany? I might mention, among many other examples, the lords of the inquisition, whose infidelity, in many instances, is no secret. One of the most cruel persecutions that modern history affords, was that of the Protestants in France, when the edict of *Nantz* was revoked. Of this

this *M. Jurieu* remarks it, as a singular circumstance, (tho' far from being so singular as he imagined) that neither the *King*, nor *Clergy* who were the most active instruments in it, were bigots in religion, but rather a sort of *free-thinkers*. *Lewis* dismissed a father confessor out of his service, who had the simplicity to imagine that the king had as much religion as to turn off a whore. And the Pope was insulted by him at the same time that he persecuted the Protestants. As for the church of *Scotland*, the severest persecution we have been exposed to since the Reformation, and wherein the most barbarous cruelties were exercised, broke out upon the Restoration of king *Charles II.* Was he, were his chief instruments in those tyrannical barbarities, bigots in religion? Was not the king a noted infidel? A free-thinker, and a free-liver too? Was the earl of *Middleton* any better? Or that parliament of his, who, 'tis said, were constantly drunk, even when enacting their persecuting laws? Was it zeal for Episcopacy that moved the earl of *Lauderdale*, whose principles, if he had any, *Bp. Burnet* tells us, were Presbyterian to his dying day? And, to add no more to this catalogue of cruel persecutors, any body who has read the late history published by *David Hume Esq.* will easily perceive, not only by the hatred he every where discovers, of religion, and the professors of it, and the mischiefs he endeavours to load it with, but by his approbation (not indeed of any discouragement of Popery in *Britain*, but) of the French court in their persecution of the Protestants, and of the English court in persecuting the Puritans, that he has not the patience to wait, till the government be in the hands of professed infidels, to let us know what we are then to expect at their hands.

A reflection on such facts, as well as on the nature of the thing, I must own, did not a little raise my indignation in 1745 when the *Jacobites*, in order to kill our fears of persecution asleep, so often made insinuations that the young Pretender had no religion at all. My indignation was chiefly at the *Whigs* who gave such a reception to that argument as to encourage the repeating of it. The very argument which convinced me that his persecution would be without any bounds. For, besides that there can be no true charity, where there is no

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true religion, no regard for men, where there is none for God: it was extremely obvious, that before he could be in quiet possession of *Britain*, the opposition he would have met with from all who were Protestants in earnest, continued as long as a shilling in their pockets, or a drop of blood in their veins could be of any service in disappointing him; must have provoked all the passions of his nature against them, to the highest degree; and shown him that he could have no security, but by their utter extirpation. And, to tell me that he was of no religion, was only saying in other words, that the suggestions of his interest and passion would have been under no restraint, by super-
 or considerations, from proceeding to the utmost excess of cruelty and barbarity.

Yet after all, the children of *Cain*, whose rooted enmity against the seed of *Abel* is inextinguishable, have not only the heaviest hands, but do likewise make the loudest complaints, even when nothing but the most necessary self-defence is intended. For pray what is this mighty *infringement of their privilege, that must ever be regarded with concern by all reasonable men?* Is it thrusting them, in crowds, into noisome and stinking dungeons? Starving their families by exorbitant fines and confiscations? Hanging them on gibbets, drowning them at stakes within the sea mark, or shooting them without ceremony, like wild beasts, in the fields; Squeezing the marrow out of their bones, by boots and thumb-knives? as many a good man was used before the revolution, by those who, evidently, had no religion at all, which yet, if we believe *David Hume*, is the true source of all the mischief in the world. Would any body imagine that the whole occasion of this complaint, is only a proposal that the church, by means purely spiritual, should attempt to reclaim baptized infidels, who being brought forth in her bosom, and having suckled her breasts, are now preying on her vitals, and that upon supposition of the very worst, i. e. if they neglect to hear the church, they should be unto us, as heathen men and publicans*.

So far is any thing of this sort, from being an infringement of the liberty of individuals, that, on the contrary, such a pre-
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* Mat. xviii. 17.

tenſion is an obvious infringement of the liberty of a Chriſtian ſociety. — If a club of lawyers had agreed to meet by themſelves, in order to converſe upon ſubjects peculiar to their own profeſſion, and to improve one another in the knowledge of their buſineſs; I am much miſtaken, if they would not look upon it as a rude and unmannerly encroachment upon their liberty, ſhould a parcel of tradesmen and mechanics, intrude themſelves upon their company, and confound the meaſures of their peaceable and inoffenſive ſociety. The author of Chriſtianity has committed to his followers, as a ſacred depoſitum, the doctrines and ſacraments of his religion. Theſe, he requires the miniſters of his kingdom, into whoſe hands he has committed the government of his church, to preſerve in purity; not by forcing any who are unwilling, to make a hypocritical profeſſion of regard to them; but by ſeparating themſelves from thoſe who openly and groſſly impugn, abuſe, and corrupt them. Yet this inoffenſive privilege, ſo neceſſary to the welfare at leaſt, if not to the very being of Chriſtianity, is what our enemies grudge us the exerciſe of. They officiouſly intrude themſelves into the participation of thoſe ſacraments, which they cannot but have the higheſt contempt of, and even into ſuch offices as muſt needs be to themſelves an object of ridicule. On whoſe ſide now, is the incroachment upon liberty, the infringement of privilege, or the invaſion of private judgment?

But, ſays the gentleman: “ The proper objects of cenſure and reproof are not freedom of thought, but licentiousneſs of action; not erroneous ſpeculations, but crimes pernicious to ſociety. Againſt theſe ought the clergy to exert their utmoſt efforts.” It was impoſſible for me to read this paſſage, without being thereby put in mind of a like ſort of reaſoning, that has frequently occurred to me, the caſes are ſo extremely parallel. When ſome miniſters have been regretting the little regard that is uſually paid to the inclinations of the people in the ſettlement of pariſhes, upon this account, among others, that it deprives us of one ſecurity we might have againſt the admiſſion of ſuch as prove a ſcandal to their order; gentlemen of our author’s ſtamp, have ſeldom failed to reply, “ That is your fault, if there be probationers of that charac-
ter.”

“ter. Why don’t you take care that none such be licensed,
 “or that they be disqualified, if they behave out of character?
 “There, you ought to exert your zeal, and there it, surely,
 “would be well placed.” But if any such ministers, attempt-
 ing to do what seemed to be so heartily recommended (when
 the recommendation served no other purpose but to discour-
 age another mean of promoting the same end) should have
 the simplicity to expect the concurrence and assistance of such
 gentlemen, what a disappointment would they meet with?
 What a disappointment have they always met with on such
 occasions? There are none that know any thing of the pre-
 sent state of ecclesiastical affairs in this church, but may be
 safely appealed to: who are they that put the negative upon
 processes for the censure of immoralities? that are the dead
 weight upon the exercise of discipline? that discourage every
 appearance of strictness in the licensing of probationers? But
 the very persons from whom such replies are frequently to be
 met with? Would to God, they were in earnest, when they
 talk in that strain! And that they would, upon all occasions
 talk in the same strain! But how can it be expected that the
 vigorous exercise of discipline will be really and heartily patro-
 nised by those who plead for the ordination of ministers to
 empty walls, at the expence of emptying others that were full?
 When both the ordainers and ordained, by the ancient canons
 of the church should be deposed? Who plead for the screen-
 ing of infidels from church-censure? Can it be imagined, that
 an advocate for *David Hume* is become a serious advocate for
 the repenting stool? Is it from such as he, that constables
 might expect protection, when they are barbarously abused for
 discouraging *licentiousness of action*? And is it certain, that,
 if his recommendation had all the success that some of us could
 wish, there are not other liberties we would then hear of the
 infringement of, besides the liberty of the press?

But whatever may be his sincerity in asserting what are the
 proper objects of church-censure and reproof, I have no rea-
 son to doubt of his sincerity in refusing that *error* is one of
 them. And therefore, without pressing him any farther upon
 the first, I shall thankfully accept of his concessions, that there

are some actions criminally licentious, that such actions are the proper objects of censure, and that the clergy *ought* to exert themselves against such crimes in the way of censure and reproof. Now from whence can a Christian church derive this power, and this obligation, but from the Scripture? Consequently, the Scripture is the rule which points out the proper objects thereof. And if this be yielded, his cause is lost.

Before I make out this, let me observe, that, if the gentleman had only said, that *every* erroneous speculation was not the proper object of censure, this is what I would have been very far from disputing with him. With respect to a great many of them, I am fully convinced of what the Poet says,

The God that pardons sins, will pardon errors too.

Nay, I am not only willing, but hearty and zealous for extending lenity to all errors that an honest man can be supposed to fall into, *i. e.* upon subjects where the evidence is obscure, which do not affect the substance of religion, and do not discover a rooted prejudice against it, or a bad disposition. Happy indeed, thrice happy had it been for Christians, had we reserved the censure, which, I acknowledge, has been too frequently inflicted on one another upon occasions of this sort, for such doctrines as are unfolded in the *Analysis*. But to assert, as the Observator does, in the general, and without limitation, that *erroneous speculations are not the proper objects of censure*, is really carrying the matter a little farther than the most moderate Christian can possibly follow him.

I would gladly know, whether the gentleman himself will undertake to defend this absolutely, as he has expressed it, and without the least reserve or exception. Suppose the writers in whose defence he has engaged, had, not by implication only, but in the most express terms, asserted the very worst things that he endeavours to vindicate them from. Suppose they had openly maintained, "That there is no God; or that the
"supreme Being is a deceitful, foolish, weak, and wicked be-
"ing, the author of all the wickedness in the world; that man
"is no more accountable for any action he does, than a stick,
"or a stone; that there will be, and can be no such thing as
"any future retribution, any rewarding of good, or punishing
"of

“ of bad men ; and that there is no moral good, or moral evil in any human action, but that murder, parricide, robbery, adultery, incest, &c. are just as innocent, and approvable, as the most pious and benevolent course of action ; and “ that Jesus Christ was a notorious and vile impostor.” These are but *erroneous speculations* ; and will he really say that, when they are propagated in a Christian church, by those who have been solemnly initiated members of it, the governors of that church are not, in the least, concerned in the matter, but are to suffer the obstinate propagators of them to retain the Christian character, and a right of being admitted, upon demand, to the participation, or rather profanation of the Christian sacraments, nay even to the exercise of an ecclesiastical office, and a share in the supreme government of that church ?

To say so, would be an express contradiction of himself in the concessions he has made, especially where the Christian character and privileges are claimed. For, not to insist now, upon such a *licentious* loosing the bonds of human society, opening the sluices of wickedness, and breaking down the very banks, to let in, as far as it is in one's power, a total inundation of it ; if there be any such thing as a criminal licentiousness of action, which is plainly implied in the above concessions, can there be imagined a greater, than to pretend a humble adoration of one whom he looks upon as an impostor ? to undermine, and destroy those truths which he has solemnly professed, and perhaps subscribed a sincere belief of, and engaged to maintain, support, and defend ?

But, without having recourse to this ; if the Scripture is to determine what are the proper objects of church censure, which is implied in the concessions ; are not some *erroneous speculations* there represented as *criminal* ? Not to repeat what has been already said on that subject, are not *Heresies* enumerated among the *works of the flesh*, which are manifest, and which exclude from the kingdom of God * ? The same Apostle plainly imputes a bad conscience to infidels when he tells us that, in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared as with a hot

E 2

iron.

* Gal. v. 20.

from *. Let any one but read the epistle of *Jude* and the 2d chap. of the 2d Epistle of *Peter*, to save me the trouble of transcribing them, where he will find *erroneous speculations*, represented as the most *criminal licentiousness*, and such names given to the *Observer's free-thinkers*, as would be thought extremely rude and unmannerly in me, if I had not an authority for it that will bear me out, at least, with my fellow Christians. So that, by the scripture account, the gentleman would be concluded by his own rule, and obliged to admit *some erroneous speculations as proper objects of church censure*; the teaching and propagating of them being plainly declared in the Scripture, *to be licentious actions and crimes pernicious to society, against which, he says, the clergy ought to exert their utmost efforts.*

There is no necessity however, even for going so far to fetch an argument from the Scripture upon this point. The teaching and propagating of *erroneous speculations* in opposition to the fundamental doctrines of religion is not only declared to be a proper object of censure; (how little must the Scripture be read, when this is denied by even such as write for the information of the general assembly?) but the church is expressly commanded and required to exert their utmost efforts against it, and the rulers thereof are themselves pronounced criminal, if they do not inflict the highest degree of censure upon such false teachers, as betrayers of the trust committed to them, and becoming thereby art and part in the destruction of immortal souls, which may perish thro' their negligence.

How earnestly does the apostle *Paul* insist upon this? Now *I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple* †. This is what he expressly commands *Titus* to do. *A man that is an heretick, after the first and second admonition reject: Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself* ‡. And again, *For there are many unruly and vain talkers and de-*

ceivers

* 1 Tim. iv. 1, 2.

† Rom. xvi. 17, 18.

‡ Tit. iii. 10, 11.

ceivers—Whose mouth must be stopped.—Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be found in the faith *. To the same purpose likewise he charges Timothy. If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words &c. from such withdraw thyself †. Nay, whatever be the character or station of the person, tho' an apostle himself, or an angel, he would not have him spared. Though we, says he, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be anathema †. The apostle John goes still farther, and interdicts any unnecessary communication with such a person, even in the civil intercourse of common life, and that on pain of being held partaker in his crime. If there come, says he, any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. For he that biddeth him God speed is PARTAKER of his evil deeds ||. Accordingly the apostle Paul sets his own example before Timothy, for the imitation of him, and all ministers of the gospel, in excommunicating Hymeneus, and Alexander, who concerning faith had made shipwreck §. And our Saviour himself commends the zeal and diligence of the church of Ephesus in this respect, that they had tried them which say they are Apostles, and are not, and had found them liars **. As on the other hand, he reproves and threatens the church of Pergamos for not censuring those among them that vented erroneous speculations, particularly concerning morals. But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, &c. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to thee quickly, &c *†. In like manner, he complains of the church in Thyatira. Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, who calleth herself a Prophetess to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols *||. That it was not outward violence, or temporal penalties which our Saviour desiderated, but that censure and reproof were the only, or the most effectual means

* Tit. i. 10, 11.

† 1 Tim. vi. 3, 5.

† Gal. i. 8.

|| 2 John 10, 11.

§ 1 Tim. i. 19.

** Rev. ii. 2.

*† ver. 14, 15, 16.

*|| Rev. ii. 20.

means the church then had, or, as a church, can have, to restrain erroneous teachers, is so obvious, that it scarcely needs to be taken notice of. And if Heresy, which is but a *partial* infidelity, is so proper an object of church censure; no doubt, in proportion to the extensive and important nature of the error that is taught, so must the necessity be of animadverting upon it.

The practice of the church in her purest times has been so conformable to these frequent and express injunctions of the scripture, that the one may help to throw some light upon the other. 'Tis certain that the Christian church, especially in the primitive times, as well as since the reformation, has been so watchful against the corruption, which the doctrine of religion is always liable to, and it has been so much the business of Synods and Councils to censure the teachers of error, that to bring a formal proof of this, would be to light a candle at noon.

Of the primitive church, I shall only observe that the severity of her discipline in this point, as well as in most others indeed, were any thing near it to be proposed now, would be considered as extravagant, and excessive. They would not, agreeable to the direction of the apostle *Paul**, so much as suffer any of the faithful to bring a cause before a civil judge, who dealt in *erroneous speculations*, that were inconsistent with the faith†. Ten years penance, and when the erroneous had been in any ecclesiastical office, twelve years were prescribed, before they were to be admitted, when penitent, into the communion of the church. Even the *lapsed* and the *traditors*, in the heat of persecution, were severely censured. And yet, as *Cyprian* justly observes, there is no comparison between the infirmity of such, and a voluntary departure from the faith‡.

So

* 1 Cor. vi. 1.

† Catholicus qui causam suam sive justam sive injustam, ad judicium alterius & dei judicis provocat, excommunicatur. Conc. Carth. 4. Can. 87.

‡ Qui, Dei traditione contempta, appetunt alienas doctrinas, ----- Pejus hoc crimen est quam quod admisisse lapsi videntur, qui tamen in penitentia criminis constituti, Deum plenius satisfactionibus deprecantur. Hic ecclesia quaeritur & rogatur: illie ecclesiae repugnatur. Hic potest necessitas fuisse: illic voluntas tenetur in scelere.

Hic

So little do I apprehend that the fact will be contested, or that any body who has the least acquaintance with church history, will deny, that *erroneous speculations* have always been considered as *proper objects of censure*, that I am sensible, and will not dissemble, on my part, that Synods have, often, rather *overdone* in this matter, by extending that power, which no Christian can deny, to the smaller differences that do not affect the substance of religion, and that may subsist among honest inquirers in this imperfect state. But 'tis universally allowed, that the *abuse* of a power, does not infer the *nullity* of it; or rather that *mistakes* about the practice of a duty incumbent upon us, will not vacate the obligation of doing it in a right manner. This is a power, which our Saviour, when he came into the world, found the Jewish church in the possession of, and which they made a very bad use of, excommunicating all those who confessed that he was the *Messias* *. Yet neither he, nor his apostles, ever offered to dispute with them, whether *erroneous speculations* were the *proper objects of church censure*.

As for the church of *Scotland*, to go no higher than the revolution, tho' infidelity was far from being so openly propagated then as it is now, and books of that kind, only came from abroad, we find soon after that period, an act of assembly against *the atheistical opinions of the Deists*, wherein it is enacted that "Seducers, after sufficient instructions and admonition, be proceeded against as scandalous and heretical Apostates *use to be* †". In *the form of process*, Atheism, Heresy, and error vented and made publick, are enumerated among the grossest scandals that ought to be prosecuted in order to the highest censures of the church ‡. The commission is annually instructed to "enquire into the publishing of books and pamphlets tending towards the promoting of opinions, of whatever kind, inconsistent with our *Confession of Faith*, and that the recom-

"men-

Hic qui lapsus est, sibi tantum nocuit: Ille qui haeresim vel schisma facere conatus est, multos secum trahendo decipit. Certe peccasse se hic & intelligit, & lamentatur, & plangit: ille tumens in peccato suo, & in ipsis sibi delictis placens, a matre filios segregat, oves a pastore sollicitat, Dei sacramenta disturbat. Et cum lapsus semel peccaverit, isto quotidie peccat. Cyp. de unitate Ecclesiae.

* John ix. 22. and xii. 42.

† Act 21. Assembly 1696.

‡ Chap. 6. §. 1.

“ menders of such books or pamphlets, or of the errors there-
 “ in contained, be called before the said commission, to answer
 “ for the same.” Nay, ’tis a notour fact, that all the members
 of our supreme judicatory, must, and do sign it as the confes-
 sion of their faith, that “ they who, upon pretence of Christian
 “ liberty, do publish such opinions, or maintain such practices,
 “ as are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known prin-
 “ ciples of Christianity, whether concerning faith, worship, or
 “ conversation; or to the power of godliness; or such errone-
 “ ous opinions or practices as, either in their own nature, or
 “ in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are de-
 “ structive to the external peace and order which Christ hath
 “ established in the church, may lawfully be called to account,
 “ and proceeded against by the censures of the church *.” As
 this likewise makes part of an act of parliament †, which is
 made unalterable by the treaty of union, it might be expected,
 that the lawyers at least, would show more regard to it, as a
 law of the land. But, at how low a rate, must the most formal
 professions, and engagements be supposed now to pass current,
 when the bare *ipse dixit* of the Observator is all the argument
 that is thought needful to persuade those who have subscribed
 this, that *erroneous speculations are not the proper objects of*
censure?

It is not only the *Christian*, or the *Jewish* churches: the
 Heathens themselves, in a religious capacity, claimed the same
 privilege, and exercised it too, as we are informed by *Cæsar*
 in his Commentaries ‡. And indeed without the exercise of this
 natural right, the church must soon become a confused medley
 of Protestants, Papists, Mahometans, Heathens, Deists, and
 Atheists, in a word, a perfect hotch-potch of the most opposite
 and inconsistent religions: especially, when there is so little
 conscience so much as pretended, about joining outwardly in
 the very things that are the objects of their contempt and ridi-
 cule, as our present infidels are not ashamed, almost openly to
 avow. Any voluntary society, associated for particular purpo-
 ses, if they cannot, or do not defend themselves against the

intru-

* Conf. of Faith ch. xx. Art. 4.

† Act 5. Stat. 2. Parl. 1. W. and M.

‡ de bello Gal. lib. 6.

intrusion of the most declared enemies, and opponents of the ends they have in view, but stand exposed, without remedy; to all the consequences of such unnatural mixture, must needs be the weakest and most helpless things that can be imagined, and must, very soon, fall into such absolute ruin and confusion, as will utterly disqualify them, for prosecuting the purposes for which they associated.

Many, however, of our present church-rulers, and it seems, by the omission of their duty hitherto, those who have most influence in the general assembly, seem to have but little sense of the obligation they are under to animadvert, in a judicative capacity, on the atheistical writings that have been lately published among us; tho' one of the authors openly avows them, by prefixing his name, in a sort of Bravado, and the other is sufficiently pointed out, by a *Fama* which he does not contradict.—We are often asked; what good purposes can be served by such a prosecution?—Whether we are disposed to gratify *David Hume*, by doing the thing in the world that would give him the highest pleasure?—Or, if we wish to see a new edition sold, of books that are lying on the booksellers hands, and, if disregarded, sinking with their own weight?

Whether the *opposers* of such a prosecution do *really* exceed the *promoters* of it, (as some of their pleadings against it would insinuate) in their zeal against error, and their concern to prevent the spreading of it, I will not pretend to say. Those who know the men and their communication, on both sides of the question, will judge as they see cause. But in answer to these queries, I shall readily acknowledge, that, if it was merely a matter of prudential consideration; if it was only a power the church had, which she was left at liberty to exercise, or not, as she saw occasion; but not a duty expressly enjoined upon her, for the neglect of which, she herself was liable to be called to account by the great Head of the church, there would be some more room left, for discussions of this sort. Only as human nature is the same in all ages, I'm afraid that such sort of reasonings, which would have equal force in all cases of the like kind, have too much the air of pretending to be wiser than the author of the Christian constitution, and seeing farther into the consequences of things than those who were divinely inspired.

Why might not the churches of *Pergamos* and *Thyatira* have defended their own slothfulness upon the principles that are now in vogue, and replied to *the Son of God, who hath his eyes like a flame of fire*: "The church of *Ephesus* judged extremely ill, to make any noise about the false teachers, which can have no other effect, but to raise peoples curiosity, and make the mischief more extensive. We are upon a much better concerted plan, and that is, never to mind them, which, you may depend on't, you'll find in the issue, will more effectually disconcert their measures: And, if you'll have but a little patience, you'll soon find, that the whole matter will die away of its own accord?" Why did not *Timothy* and *Titus* make the same representation to the apostle *Paul*, when he laid upon them the injunctions that have been mentioned? If our wise counsellors are in the right, what a pity it is, that among all the founders of Christianity, there was no man of their deep penetration, to suggest how ill contrived the rules are, which the apostles have left us upon record, for the management of *free-thinkers* and their *erroneous speculations*? The very rules, it seems, that are best adapted to the disseminating of infidelity? Or that they should not, now, have honesty or interest enough, to get so idle, and ill judged a clause left out of the annual instructions to the commission?

To the first of their questions, what good purposes can be served by such a prosecution? I shall answer, in the very words which they themselves have signed as the confession of their faith. "Church censures are NECESSARY for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren, for deterring of others from the like offences, for purging out the leaven which might infect the whole lump, for vindicating the honour of Christ, and the holy profession of the gospel, and for preventing the wrath of God which might justly fall upon the church, if they should suffer his covenant and the seals thereof to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders *."

The first of these, is the reason most frequently insisted upon in the scripture, for the exercise of discipline, and even for excommunication; *that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus †, that they may learn not to blaspheme ‡, that they may*

* Gen. of Faith, Ch. 30. § 3.

† 1 Cor. v. 5.

‡ 1 Tim. i. 20.

may be saved, pulling them out of the fire*. And if church censure be a mean appointed, for this purpose, by divine institution; why should we not try it upon the present occasion? Would we not be prompted to it, by a true love, not only to Jesus Christ, but to the perishing souls of the erroneous themselves? If any of them are men of eminent abilities, or in eminent stations in church or state, should not this be an additional motive, to gain such brethren, for the sake of the extensive benefit which might thereby accrue to the whole community? And why should we despair of success, in using a mean instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ, with which we may therefore expect his blessing? Why despair even of *David Hume*?—Church history affords us many instances of conversions brought about, that were as unhoped, and by more unlikely means; of a proud conceited philosopher, who came to the council of *Nice* out of curiosity, that was converted by a plain simple man, who only gave him an account of the doctrines of Christianity, and asked him, if he did not believe them? Of a great courtier who had apostatised, and was converted by the rebuke of a good old martyr, as he happened accidentally to be carried by him in chains. What ground, can we possibly have, for limiting the divine grace, while we are in the exercise of means, which God has commanded us to use? Shall we sit absolutely still, and see (if it should come to that) men even of the greatest eminence and importance among us, not only perishing themselves, but doing their utmost to draw others into perdition too, and ruining the spiritual, and (which must be the consequence of it) temporal interests of the community, without so much as attempting to deal with their consciences, in the least degree? Without so much as trying any of those *admonitions, instructions, and frequent conferences*, which are enjoined in the form of process, in the case of errors, that are of smaller consequence, to reclaim without cutting off? Are we so diffident of the evidence, we have for the great truths of natural and revealed religion, that we dare not venture a conference with infidels? I can say, for my own part, and I believe, I may venture to undertake for others on the same side of this question, that we should be for managing with all the tenderness and concern for their

their eternal happiness that their precious immortal souls require at our hands; yea with all the regard that is due to their characters, and station in the world, and with all the indulgence to their own credit and reputation, that is consistent with the superior regard that is always owing to the interests of truth and religion: And that gaining them over to these interests, would be a thousand times more agreeable to us, than the inflicting upon them any censure whatever.——But if we should have no success; is this a sufficient reason for our neglecting our own duty? If ministers were never to preach repentance to impenitent sinners, but when they have some probable expectation of success, I am afraid this subject would be but rarely touched upon. But when they *have laboured in vain, and spent their strength for nought and in vain, yet surely their judgment is with the Lord, and their work with their God* *. *If thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity: But his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it: If he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity: But thou hast delivered thy soul* †.

This, however, is not the only reason that is given in the scripture for the exercise of discipline. *Them that sin, says the apostle, rebuke before all, that others also may fear* ‡. And if care be taken, to apply censure and reproof, *only* to the breach of *Christ's* laws; there can be no doubt of its having this effect. Indeed when church rulers prostitute the censures instituted by Christ, to the ignoble purposes of party and faction, to the supporting of their *own* authority, instead of, or in opposition to that of their *Master*, and for the discrediting of truth, or even of such errors as are consistent with honesty, and a real regard for truth and goodness, and which Christ has commanded them to bear with; in these cases, I confess, the Christian discipline, faithful to its original intention, has always scorned to serve the interests, or promote the views of any other than him from whom it derives its authority. No sooner does it touch a conscience, but 'tis ready to turn about and worry them that set it on, or to defeat the end which is thereby aimed at. But when it is administered according to the laws of its great author, when

censure

* Isaiah xlix. 4.

† Ezek. xxxiii. 8, 9.

‡ 1 Tim. v. 20.

censure is inflicted upon the teachers of *gross* and *fundamental* errors, such as obviously destroy all religion, and are so far from having the very pretence of conscience for propagating them, that they are, evidently, calculated for banishing all conscience out of the world, in this case it cannot fail to have an effect. Degenerate as mankind are, there is still so much of *the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness**, of the judgment of God, that they who commit wickedness are worthy of death, even when they not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do it†; so indelible are the impressions of this upon the human mind, that all attempts to efface them, may easily be brought to recoil upon the authors, with such discredit to the cause, as will prove no small discouragement to the farther prosecution of it. Tho' a tyrant may rather lose ground by setting a *good* man on the Pillory for a commendable action, yet a faithful, honest Magistrate, will oft times find it both useful and necessary, to expose wickedness to the same disgrace. An action truly dishonourable in itself will be rendered *more so* by the infamy of such a punishment. And many who would have ventured upon all the shame which is the *natural* consequence of a base action, are deterred from the commission thereof, by the public and *penal* ignominy to which it would expose them. Let any one but reflect, how bold, and how daring infidelity is grown amongst us, since the sensible relaxation of our discipline, beyond whatever it was before that period; and I dare say, it will be owned, that there was once a time, when it *durst* not appear so open and bare-faced in the church of Scotland. Our own pusillanimity, and coolness in the interests of God and our Redeemer, has brought upon us that contempt, which we ourselves, perhaps, may; but which the cause that suffers along with us, does certainly, by no means, deserve. Would we, again, resume that spirit, which once animated our judicatories, and point the church artillery as it ought to be; if instead of turning it inwards, and letting fly at our fellow servants, who are distinguished by a regard for their Master, it were levelled against his open and declared enemies, this church might yet again, as it has formerly been, become terrible to them *as an army with banners*. Indeed, if

* Rom. ii. 15.

† Ch. i. 33.

It is discharged at random, and especially, if the most zealous friends of the churches King, and of her spiritual interests are particularly marked at; perhaps there are better Christians than *David Hume* pretends to be, who will consider a hurt thereby, as no dishonourable scar. But as long as the cause one suffers in, is, and must be taken into the account, is it to be imagined, when open enmity to the principles of natural and revealed religion, is the object of censure, that every body will be of that gentleman's opinion, and look upon church censure, in such a cause, as an honourable badge of distinction? If this were the case; I doubt much, if a gentleman so noted for an affectation of singularity, would continue in that opinion himself. The sollicitude expressed by *Sopho's* friends, to ward off a censure, is no evidence that they concur in it. And whatever effect it may have on any of these gentlemen; did it contribute, in any degree to put a stop to the farther progress of infidel writings among us, by scaring others from imitating their example, it would be, so far at least, well bestowed.

But if church censure should have no effect, either in *reclaiming offenders*, or in deterring others from the like offences, which no body can conclude, who considers them as instituted by Christ for these purposes, and having the promise of his blessing; yet, they are nevertheless NECESSARY, for a third reason, namely, for purging out the leaven which might infect the whole lump. This is what the apostle had no small sollicitude about, and for the neglect of which, he so sharply reprimands the church of *Corinth*. *And ye are puffed up*, says he, *and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven**. Though the church cannot hinder men from being infidels, or from propagating infidelity; yet surely, it is her fault, if it be done within the church. And though we cannot be answerable for other mens actions; we must be, for our own. All our brethren's objections against the two first arguments, must be strong confirmations of the third: For if there are men amongst us, that are *irreclaimable* infidels; if they glory in being so; and if a censure upon that account would

* 1 Cor. v. 2, 6, 7.

would be so far from having influence in deterring them from propagating it, that it would encourage them to do so; surely, it is high time to make a separation between them, and professed Christians. *Be ye not*, says an inspired apostle, *unequally yoked together with unbelievers: For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you* *.

Ever since the fall of man, the corruption of the world has been so great, and so universal, that in order to keep up some visible regard to God, and some acceptable publick worship of him, he has thought fit to *separate* a church to himself out of the world; and to distinguish them from the rest of mankind, as his own *peculiar*. The promiscuous communication, which the visible professing people of God, had with the profaner sort, even in the old world, the laying open that ground, which ought to have been a *garden inclosed*, with the consequences thereof, was the very thing †, which provoked God to sweep his house clean, by that terrible, and desolating flood of waters, which reduced the church to a single family. When that family was multiplied, and again corrupted, and alienated from the true worship and service of God; he called *Abraham*, and his posterity, and gave them circumcision, as a badge of distinction. It was with a view to preserve them a separate people that he raised about them the *hedge* of the ceremonial law, and made it so penal for them to mix with the Heathen. Now that this hedge is pulled up, which was typical of the Christian discipline, there is no possibility of preserving the church, in any degree of purity, or indeed from being a sink of all the filthiness of the world, without cutting off from her communion those, who, while they bear the *Christian* name, do yet obstinately cast off any *credible profession* of religion.

For this purpose, Christ hath erected his church into a *spiritual kingdom*, and instituted therein a *spiritual government*, with

* 2 Cor. vi. 14.

† Gen. vi. 2.

with proper officers to exercise this government under himself, the supreme King and Head of the society, in an exact conformity with his own directions. *The weapons of their warfare are not carnal, but mighty thro' God to the pulling down of strong holds, casting down imaginations, [or reasonings *] and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ, and having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience †.* If there are any of the *ministers* of this kingdom who will not consider the church in this light, and think it incumbent upon them to act no other part, but that of *public teachers*, (as some of them have of late affected to call themselves, altering the stile with the constitution) if in a *spiritual* judicature, they will execute no other laws, but those of the *civil Magistrate*; they certainly do betray a very considerable and important part of their trust, and will have to answer to the *King of the church*, for the *external* purity, the purity of profession, in that society whose spiritual interest was committed to their care. The *insincerity* of professed Christians, is what they must leave to the judgment of the great day; as they can neither help it, nor are they proper judges of it. But, if the church be *visibly* compounded, of those who make *no profession* of religion, as well as of those who do; this, as it is plainly a proper object of human judgment; so it necessarily implies a breach of trust, in them; as the censure of *excommunication* was instituted on purpose to prevent it.—And that for these obvious, and weighty reasons, which they themselves have declared their assent to.

The *first* is, to prevent the spreading of the infection and corrupting of the sound part of the church. God knows how ready we are to be infected with any thing that is evil. We are more apt to catch a disease than health from one another. *Evil communications corrupt good manners ‡.* Any body that reads the history of the Old Testament, and will be at the pains to observe the proneness of the *Jews* to fall in with the idolatry, and other sins of their heathen neighbours, cannot be surprized at the precautions taken by divine wisdom, to guard against a too familiar correspondence with them. And there is

no

* λογισμὸς

† 2 Cor. x. 4, 5, 6.

‡ 1 Cor. xv. 33.

no infection whatever, that can be imagined more catching, and at the same time, more dangerous, and fatal, than that of the errors now vented among us. What can be more gratifying to the corrupt natures of obstinate sinners, than whatever serves to quiet their consciences under the indulgence of vicious habits? any plausible pretence to throw the blame of their wickedness off themselves? and to supersede the disagreeable work of repentance? Nay who can shut their eyes so close, as not to perceive, how sensibly, and with how quick a pace infidelity is actually advancing in the *church of Scotland*? How the particular doctrines of the gospel, like the branches of a tree, seem to be gradually lopped away, even where the stump continues in the ground? How infidel *grafts* are admitted where the *stock* would yet be thrown over the hedge? Are not many, even of the *clergy* themselves already infected with *Sopho's* doctrine of *necessity*? I would fain hope, indeed, that there are none of them so consistent in it, as he is, and that they do not carry it thro' all its genuine consequences, as he does. But what a dangerous step is made toward the consequences themselves, when once the principles are admitted, from whence they necessarily flow? And if the contagion has had such effects among the *clergy* themselves, what can be thought of other ranks and orders of men?—Our enemies will tell the rest with pleasure.—Is it not high time then to *purge out the old leaven that we may be a new lump*?

Especially considering that “the honour of Christ, and the holy profession of the gospel cannot be otherwise vindicated,” than by resuming his name and the character of his disciples, from those who *hold doctrines which he hates**, and which would expose the whole of his undertaking for the redemption of mankind to manifest ridicule. Add to this, the last consideration mentioned in our *Confession*, namely, “the preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the church, if they should suffer his covenant and the seals thereof to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.” How far any of our infidels think fit to partake of the sacred mysteries of Christianity, or to pour an open contempt upon them, I do not pretend to know. If this last should happen to be the case, I hope the *degree* of their offence, and of their casting off the profession of our religion, will not be made an argument to screen them from censure. I shall only say that, as modern infidels have seldom any scruple to act a hypocritical part, or to do any thing else which their temporal conveniency requires; so they cannot be regularly excluded, if they should happen to demand admittance; but *secundum allegata & probata*. And therefore all those church rulers who plead for continuing them in full communion, or in a *capacity of admittance*, are chargeable with the whole consequences,

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* Rev. ii. 15.

ces, of profaning the seals of the Christian covenant, seeing they lie open to profanation thro' their fault.

These are the purposes, for which all the members of every general assembly do declare their belief, that church censures are NECESSARY, and for which, the rulers of the church are, in the Scripture, not left at liberty, but expressly required to inflict them, and threatened, if, in such circumstances as we are now speaking of, they omit, or neglect so necessary and important a duty. Purposes too important, and a command too peremptory, to be eluded by any accidental, apprehended, or uncertain inconveniences, which a fertile imagination may figure, for an excuse. And what, pray, are the inconveniences that are alledged upon this occasion? The first is merely personal, viz. the *pleasure* which, 'tis supposed, it would give to one of the gentlemen, to have such publick notice taken of him. And, tho' I do not remember to have heard it mentioned, I shall take the liberty to add, the *pain* it would give to the other, as what may, perhaps, have no less weight with the objectors.

But in good earnest, can it be thought that any body who has signed the above paragraph of the *Confession*, will admit any apprehended effect of this sort, as a sufficient dispensation from the practice of their own duty, whatever may be the various and opposite dispositions of others? When the Apostle *Paul* preached the gospel at *Rome*, *some believed the things that were spoken, and some believed not*. And yet *he received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God* *. The ordinances of *Christ*, like the rain that descendeth from heaven, must be promiscuously dispensed, whatever various soils it may fall upon, and what ever different effects it may have; as we know not where, or when the blessing may light. While a shower seems to fall idly upon a rock, and drowns the marsh, it is, at the same time, indispensibly necessary to the springing of grass and corn, for the sustenance of man and beast. The sun, tho' it chaps the stiff clay, and scorches the barren sand, yet it shines on both, as well as on the loamy soil, where it cherishes the fruits of the ground. So the divine institutions must be observed, whether men be pleased, or displeased, *whether they will hear or whether they will forbear, and even when they are most rebellious*. *Be not THOU rebellious, like that rebellious house* †.

The same thing may serve, in a great measure, for answer to the other objection, which is of a more general nature, and is usually brandished against us with a formidable glare. You are sensible, say the objectors, how dangerous it is to spread such infectious writings among men who are disposed to catch at any thing that may furnish them with an excuse for their own miscarriages. And then we are put

* Acts xviii. 24, 30. † Ezek. ii. 7, 8.

put in mind how *authors* and *booksellers* have wished, and even solicited for a *condemnation* of books and pamphlets that were lying on their hand. And the effects of such measures are displayed, perhaps not without a good deal of exaggeration.

But whatever be in this, 'tis certain, that an argument which proves too much, must be good for nothing. Now, if there be any thing at all in this sort of reasoning, it will equally militate against the exercise of discipline in the case of *every* error, nay of *every scandal* whatever. What is the great evil of a *scandalous* sin in a professed Christian? But that 'tis a contagious example, helps to lessen the horror we ought to have at sin, by rendering it more familiar to every one that hears of it, and discredits the profession of Christianity? So that when a sin is committed, it would be, so far at least, happy, if it could be kept a secret. But if this cannot be done; are we therefore never to *rebuke a sinner before all*, never to mention it in a judicial or publick manner, lest we should contribute to spread the knowledge of it wider? But suffer the Christian society to consist of, and its sacred mysteries to be profaned by, a promiscuous company, of open adulterers, and whoremongers, thieves and robbers, drunkards and swearers, Deists and Atheists? *Hoc iſtae velit*. Some there are perhaps who would be highly delighted with this. But is it a measure that has ever been recommended by those who have discovered the greatest zeal and concern for the interest of Christianity, and of true religion in the world? Is it consistent with Scripture precepts, or with the constitution of the Christian church? Did it ever obtain in the purest times of religion? Or rather does it not mark out its most *degenerate* periods?

The truth is, most *remedies*, like *drugs* (which ought never to be administered, but when the body is really diseased) are apt, at first, to irritate the humours, and put them into a greater fermentation. But was ever any wise physician, for this reason, of opinion, that all diseases should be left, without remedy, to prey with their whole force, upon the natural body? This, however, is the whole amount of the objection now under consideration. Infidelity is the most dangerous and fatal disease that a *church* is liable to. Never were there such violent symptoms of it in the *church of Scotland*, as at present. And yet our ecclesiastical *physicians* are for letting her die of it, rather than afford the least assistance: not because nature seems to be working it off; but, (unless they apprehend our symptoms to be more than ordinarily mortal) because it is the nature, it seems, of every remedy to increase the disease. In the case of ever so reasonable and defensive a war, the very preparations that are necessary to carry it on with success, do naturally produce effects, that have a *tendency* to defeat the design of them.

They must needs alarm the enemy, put them on their guard, make

them arm by sea and land, fortify their frontiers, and their strong holds. And 'tis impossible to manage our defence, without shedding a great deal of the blood of our own countrymen, as well as of the enemy. Is all this, however, and a great many other inconveniences that never fail to attend a state of war, ever thought a *sufficient* reason, for suffering an open and avowed enemy to do what he pleases, to invade our territories, murder old and young, burn our stateliest cities and most magnificent palaces, overturn our constitution, and make us and our children slaves, without the least resistance?

If men will not act, when there is the least appearance of any difficulty, there would be a stop put to all the business of the world. One would scarcely turn upon his bed as the door upon his hinges, if he was to indulge all the terrors of the slothful who saith there is a lion in the way, a lion is in the streets *. To this purpose, is another observation of the same wise man; He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds, shall not reap †. Will any man pretend to say, that the selling a few more copies of erroneous books, chiefly perhaps among the clergy, and such as are least liable to be poisoned therewith (for those who have a taste for such intellectual food, may be presumed to have already satiated their craving stomachs, without waiting till the assembly should point it out) and that with a publick brand of *infamy*, is to be compared with all the effects of retaining in the Christian society, the authors of such books, and permitting them, under the Christian name and character, to spread the infection, with greater probability of success; thereby encouraging both them and others, to proceed in such a course, without the least fear of censure?

Christianity or *natural religion* is far from being apprehensive of a fair hearing; far from *skulking* (as such a plea seems to represent her) like a sneaking coward behind a covert; as if she were disposed to put up with the grossest affront, rather than expose her weakness in repelling the rudest attacks. *Unum gestit, ne ignorata damnetur*. The strength of her present enemies lies chiefly in their masked character, in the hypocritical profession they make of some sort of regard to religion. They can mention *sin* and *wickedness*, as if they had ideas to these words: while they labour, with all their might, to prove the utter impossibility, of any such thing. They talk of God, and of *virtue*, and sometimes even of a *Saviour*, as if they were, really, objects of their veneration. Nay, they do not stick to affect *Rhapsodies* upon some of these subjects, as if they had a real esteem for them: while, in the mean time, with all the slyness and subtilty they are masters of, they endeavour to undermine the whole beautiful building of which they profess an admiration; depriving God of every attribute, subvert-

* Prov. xxvi. 13, 14.

† Eccl. xi. 4.

ing the very foundation of virtue and morality, explaining away every real instance, every particular branch of it, and robbing it of all its most powerful motives. They murder religion, with the same treachery as *Joab* did *Amasa*; while they kiss her, smiting her under the fifth rib. To this treachery, is owing the success they have had, in so far as they have beguiled any unstable souls, or perverted the minds of any who have not a rooted enmity at all religion. Let them be but stript of that disguise, which gives them all the advantage they have over the simple and unwary, and exposed in their native colours, as in a declared war against every thing that has been held in the highest esteem, or as the most important truths, among mankind, against the true God, against piety and virtue, the accountableness of moral agents, the immortality of the soul, the eternal happiness of good, and the eternal misery of wicked men; and the snare would be broken that has caught their prey. Let them be, unto Christians, what they really are, as *Heathen men and Publicans*; and we could bid defiance to their utmost efforts, at least when they are made upon any who do not already hate the light, and love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.

This is all that is demanded; that infidel writings be not suffered to retain this advantage which they have from the Christian character continued with the authors. That they be not allowed the sanction of a Christian licence, or permission to spread such infectious poison, and circulate such counterfeit coin. For when the laws of Christianity, and of this church for censuring infidels and hereticks, are so express and so notour, the refusing to do it on the present occasion, may easily be interpreted into a licence, and really is, in effect, equivalent to a permission for any member of the society to imitate the indulged example. This is what makes the reading of them so dangerous, and contributed to ensnare the unwary. Whereas, if the church would but do her duty, and let all her members know what sort of books they are, and on what side they are written, which is a piece of justice, made necessary by the treacherous manner of the attack; they who may, after that, have the curiosity to look into them, are put upon their guard; and according to the proverb, *He that is warned, is half armed*. If, after that, the gospel be hid, it will be hid only to them that are lost, to them that love irreligious doctrines, because they are irreligious. And, if there be any of this character, who wait for the censure of a Christian church, to recommend to them writings of that strain, it is but agreeable to the just judgment of God, that the ordinance of discipline, like that of the word, should prove the savour of death unto death to some, as well as the savour of life unto life to others.

What has been said, will appear to be so much the more pertinent, if
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any one will be at the pains to reflect, who they are that approve, and who that oppose the churches doing her duty upon this occasion. Are not they, who, in their own sentiments, approach the nearest to the doctrine of necessity, the very persons who are so much afraid of spreading a book that, in so far, is on their own side of the question? For my part, I doubt not, but they are in earnest. But why? because this book represents a *principle* of theirs, under such an *odious* load, as is enough to sink it. But then, their concern really is, not, as it appears at first view, lest this principle be *propagated*, but lest it be *discredited*. And, for the same reason, we who abhor the *principle*, can, by no means be dissuaded from warning our fellow Christians against it, tho' the accidental effect of that warning, should be to bring some people acquainted with a book, where that principle is set in a light, that must raise the indignation of every honest man.

I have, in considering this objection, admitted the justness of the apprehension upon which it is founded, and proceeded, likewise, upon the supposition, that we were left entirely to the suggestions of human prudence; and have shewn that, even in that case, this frightful bugbear is far from being a sufficient scare-crow to deter us from using the necessary means of self-defence. But as *these means* are expressly appointed by infinite wisdom, positively commanded, by the authority of the churches *King and Head*, this must needs greatly alter the state of the argument. Our business is to do our duty: and 'tis our greatest wisdom, to leave events to God.

If, in this whole argument, I have supposed the issue of a process for censure, to be, the excommunication of the erroneous; it is not that I despair of gaining them, or that this would not be more highly agreeable. But, as the objectors could not, if that supposition was to be admitted, refuse the expedience and usefulness of such a measure, I have chosen to argue with them upon supposition of the worst that can happen,

And now to conclude; if there are any who think Christianity indeed in so low a state, that she is past recovery, so brow-beaten and contemptible, that she has no spirit to repel an attack; or if, as at the last assembly, any effort is made, that it will serve only to betray her feeble and languishing vigour to the observation of her enemies, and expose it to the sport of triumphing infidels: if they think, that religion, which at the first, in opposition to all the powers of the world, by the splendor of its miracles, and the brighter splendor of its holiness, and heavenly spirituality, flashed like lightening from one end of the earth to the other; or rather, like an irresistible flame driven by the wind over combustible matter, fired all the countries of the world at once; is now burning with so faint and dim a light, that the least puff

puff of infidel breath is like to blow out the almost expiring flame : if they think that, in a nation, where it has the firmest establishment that *laws* can give it, laws repeated and ratified in the most solemn manner, and made as irrevocable and unalterable as the wisdom of man could contrive, the very *lawyers* of that nation, may reward the bold-est attacks upon it, by any office which they have the disposal of ; while others, after a treacherous attempt to undermine it, are advanced to the highest places of dignity and authority, without the supreme church judicatory so much as appearing to know of such things ; if they think the churches own printer must be allowed to purchase infidel writings at a considerable expence, and publish them to the world, without a single question being asked him on that subject : if they really take the interest of Christianity to be now reduced to so very despicable a situation, that the general assembly itself *dare not* take the least notice of such facts, but is under a necessity to pocket every affront, and dissemble the most open and bare-faced injuries done to *Christ* and his gospel : if this is the view that any of us have of the present state of religion, it will help, in some measure, to account for the dispirited conduct of the church against her open enemies ; while her artillery is let fly, with its whole force upon the sincerest Christians who scruple to concur in executing the designs against her spiritual interests, which are acknowledged to have been contrived by those who were far from being her *true*, not so much as even her pretended friends.

But if, on the other hand, it be a greater crime to despair of religion, than it was among the *Romans*, even after the battle of *Cannae*, to despair of the republic : if it be certain that the *church* is a *kingdom that shall never be destroyed* *, and that *the gates of hell shall never prevail against her* † : if the excellency and usefulness of the Christian doctrine, as well as the clearness and certainty of its evidence are such as we have no occasion to be ashamed of, and have always been approved by the *best* and *wisest* men ; why may we not, even tho' we wanted that countenance and protection from the laws of men, and human establishments, which, in the goodness of divine providence, we yet have, resume some more spirit, and not be ashamed to speak with our enemies in the gate ?

If, on the one hand, it be, indeed, a matter of no consequence for the unbelievers to continue in their infidelity, without the least attempt to pull them out of the fire : if it be needless, or useless, and can serve no good purpose to deter others from the like offences : If indeed a little leaven does not leaven the whole lump, if there be no danger of the infection spreading among the Christian society, over whom the Holy Ghost has made the rulers of this church overseers : If it is no matter what

* Dan. ii. 44. † Mat. xvi. 18.

what materials a Christian church is composed of: If *the honour of Christ, and the holy profession of the gospel* is not, in the least stained, by the communication of his name, and the Christian character, to those who would confound the distinction between virtue and vice, who maintain that there was no occasion for the sufferings of the Son of God to pacify his Father's wrath, who was not, and could not be at all offended for what he himself was the real author of, and that he is only deceiving mankind, when their consciences accuse them of sinful actions: If there is no hazard at all of *the wrath of God justly falling upon that church* that suffers the avowed enemies of Christ to be officers in his house, and his covenant and the seals thereof to be profaned by those who must think any christian sacrament an idle and ridiculous institution; then, let our present indolence be applauded, and let that lenity be applied to the enemies of Christ, which was denied to his friends.

But if, on the other hand, we have any compassion for the perishing souls of unbelievers; if it is worth the while, either on their account, or the churches, to attempt at least, *to gain our brethren*; if we have any confidence to put in the institutions of Christ for this purpose, and the promises of his countenance that are annexed to them; if the boldness of infidels is grown to such a height, that it requires the most vigorous measures *to deter others from the like offences*; if our dastardly pusillanimity has evidently encouraged the treacherous foes we hug in our bosom to trample upon us with a degree of contempt, which our own fathers could not have conceived an idea of; if *evil communications* will certainly corrupt good manners, and the whole lamp is in hazard of being infected, while the old leaven is not purged out; if *the honour of Christ, and the holy profession of the gospel* is exposed to the scorn of the world, by a promiscuous admission to the most sacred privileges of Christians; if *the giving that which is holy unto dogs, and casting our pearls before swine*, does indeed make the persons who are represented under these characters by our Saviour himself, *trample them under their feet, as well as turn again, and rend us*; in a word, if such a conduct in church rulers does indeed expose them and the church *to the just wrath of God*, who will not long bear his ordinances to be so grossly profaned, and if the express commands, and institutions of Christ deserve any regard at their hand; then, let some experiment be made of the power and success of his own ordinances, in retrieving our distressed affairs, and reclaiming scandalous and important offenders; or, let his artillery be turned from his friends, and again pointed, as it ought to be, at his obstinate and irreclaimable foes.

F I N I S

